

Duckworth blocks transportation planning rule

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Greg Hinz on
Politics

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., has pulled the plug on a well-intentioned but highly controversial plan to get metropolitan planners all on the same page for once.

Approved unanimously by the House late yesterday was a Duckworth bill that previously had cleared the Senate rolling back an Obama-era regulation that, according to her, could have allowed the governors of Indiana and Wisconsin to hold up Illinois transportation projects, and vice versa.

The bill, Duckworth's first since entering the Senate, was approved later in the day in House under the sponsorship of Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago. It's now on its way to the desk of President Donald Trump.

At issue was a rule that would have required the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, which directs the use of U.S. transportation funds here, to merge with its counterparts in northwest Indiana and southeast Wisconsin. The idea was that all three cover parts of the metropolitan Chicago area, so they ought to be one body.

But the potential loss of local autonomy in an already balkanized planning process went over like the proverbial lead balloon here.

Duckworth, in an interview, termed the rule "misguided" and said she had no trouble assembling a bipartisan list of backers for her bill, including Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana.

The various metropolitan planning organizations work well already, she said. And officials in other states didn't want "Mayor (Rahm) Emanuel slow-walking their projects" any more than Illinois officials wanted to have to woo out-of-state leaders.

CMAP supported the bill and released a statement urging Trump to sign it to "help ensure the integrity of the regional planning process."

"Forcing MPOs to merge with other MPOs in the vicinity, even across state lines, would cause significant delays and disruptions," Lipinski said in a statement. "Mayors, planners and transit agencies from across the country have reached out to me over the past few months to express their opposition to this rule."